

House Finance Committee

State House, Room 35

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

March 25, 2026

Re: Testimony Regarding the FY2027 Governor's Recommended Budget — Department of Human Services

Name: Heather Croteau

Organization: SEIU Local 580

Department/Agency: Department of Human Services (DHS)

Viewpoint: Testifying with concerns regarding eligibility capacity, SNAP administration, and Medicaid financing

Dear Chairperson and Members of the House Finance Committee:

My name is Heather Croteau, and I am testifying on behalf of SEIU Local 580 and the state employees we represent regarding the FY2027 Governor's Budget for the Department of Human Services.

Our members include social caseworkers, supervisors, frontline staff, and administrative professionals who support and oversee the delivery of Medicaid, SNAP, childcare assistance, and other essential programs. We work closely with eligibility workers, whose role is critical to determining access to these programs.

We sit across from families every day who are trying to keep their housing, feed their children, and stay connected to healthcare. When these systems work, families stabilize. When they don't, the consequences are immediate and often severe.

The concerns raised today reflect what we are seeing in real time when systems are strained, delayed, or under-resourced.

Concern #1: Eligibility Supervisory Capacity

The budget increases workload across eligibility programs, particularly with new federal requirements under H.R. 1, but does not clearly address supervisory capacity.

Eligibility supervisors are essential to ensuring accuracy, supporting frontline staff, and maintaining consistent decision-making. Without sufficient capacity, increased workload leads to higher error rates, inconsistent determinations, and reduced support for staff managing complex cases.

For families, this results in delays, inconsistent eligibility decisions, and increased barriers to accessing services.

The Committee should require a clear plan for eligibility supervisor staffing, including how supervisory ratios will support accuracy, timeliness, and compliance.

Concern #2: SNAP Administration, Redeterminations, and System Capacity

The budget includes increased administrative requirements tied to federal changes, error rate reduction efforts, and the growing volume and complexity of redeterminations.

While we support program integrity, these changes significantly increase workload for staff and complexity for families. Without alignment between staffing, workload, and system performance, the risk of delays, improper closures, and federal penalties increases.

For families, this can mean losing benefits despite eligibility or facing repeated administrative barriers. For staff, it means higher caseloads and less time to ensure accuracy.

The Committee should require quarterly reporting on administrative costs, error rates, caseloads, and federal risk exposure, along with a clear staffing plan aligned with workload.

Concern #3: SUD Rate Freeze

Freezing Medicaid reimbursement rates for substance use disorder providers may generate short-term savings but creates long-term risk.

Providers are already struggling to retain staff. A rate freeze functions as a cut, leading to longer wait times, reduced program availability, and fewer treatment options at critical moments.

This undermines broader state investments in behavioral health.

Concern #4: Structural Medicaid Financing Gap

The budget acknowledges a growing Medicaid financing gap—projected to exceed \$150 million annually by FY2032—without a defined strategy to address it.

Absent long-term planning, the burden will fall on services, providers, and the families who rely on them.

Conclusion

SEIU Local 580 supports a DHS budget that is transparent, operationally realistic, and grounded in real-world impact.

We recommend the Committee require federal contingency planning, strengthen eligibility supervisory capacity, implement SNAP reporting on cost and risk, align workforce capacity with workload, and develop a multi-year Medicaid financing strategy.

When systems are under strain, families feel it first—and hardest.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Croteau, LICSW

COPE Secretary, SEIU Local 580